

Christ Church, 2 July 2023

**Call to worship** (based on Psalm 89)

I will sing about the wonders of your love forever, O God!  
I will tell everyone I meet about your faithfulness to all generations!  
I will declare that your love stands firm,  
that your faithfulness is as enduring as the heavens above!  
Blessed are those who know you as their God,  
for they walk in the light of your presence!

The psalm tells us – happy are those who walk in the light of God, so we sing:

**Hymn** We are marching in the light of God MP 954 (R&S 555) (3 verses, as on the screen)

We are marching in the light of God  
We are marching in the light of God  
We are marching in the light of God  
*We are marching, we are marching, ooh*  
*We are marching in the light of God*

We are living in the love of God...

We are moving in the power of God...

**Children's Time** - Sandy

**Gifts**

Holy One, receive our gifts by your grace.  
Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit  
to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. **Amen.**

**Hymn** Jesus Christ is waiting tune at R&S 243 (Now the green blade rises)

Jesus Christ is waiting,  
waiting in the streets;  
no one is his neighbour,  
all alone he eats.  
Listen, Lord Jesus,  
I am lonely too.  
Make me, friend or stranger,  
fit to wait on you.

Jesus Christ is raging,  
raging in the streets,  
where injustice spirals  
and real hope retreats.  
Listen, Lord Jesus  
I am angry too.  
In the Kingdom's causes  
let me rage with you.

Jesus Christ is healing,  
healing in the streets;  
curing those who suffer,  
touching those he greets.

Listen, Lord Jesus,  
I have pity too.  
Let my care be active,  
healing, just like you.

Jesus Christ is dancing,  
dancing in the streets,  
where each sign of hatred  
he, with love, defeats.  
Listen, Lord Jesus  
I should triumph too.  
Where good conquers evil  
let me dance with you.

Jesus Christ is calling,  
calling in the streets,  
'Who will join my journey?'  
I will guide their feet.'  
Listen, Lord Jesus,  
let my fears be few.  
Walk one step before me;  
I will follow you.

John L Bell & Graham Maule

### Opening Prayer

Holy God, your faithful love toward us never ends!  
It is as sure and dependable as the sky over our heads.  
We praise You!

We've gathered together in this place  
to offer you our worship and our thanksgiving;  
to declare to any who will listen that You are our God, and we are Your people.  
May Your Spirit be at work among us as we worship,  
opening our eyes to the light of Your presence in this place.  
To You alone, Faithful Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,  
be all glory and honour, now and forever.

Holy One, we pray for our church family. We confess our failings and lack of compassion and love. We thank you that you forgive our failings and we ask you to graciously give us a spirit of love and forgiveness that sees only the good in each other, that bears no grudges and forgives all grievances. May we learn to forgive even as you have forgiven us, that we may live together in unity. And may we be a truly welcoming place, to all who come through our doors, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

### Hymn When I needed a neighbour Red folder 107

When I needed a neighbour  
Were you there, were you there?  
When I needed a neighbour, were you there?  
*And the creed and the colour*  
*And the name won't matter*  
*Were you there?*

I was hungry and thirsty  
Were you there, were you there?  
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?

I was cold, I was naked  
Were you there, were you there?  
I was cold, I was naked, were you there?

When I needed a shelter  
Were you there, were you there?  
When I needed a shelter were you there?

When I needed a healer  
Were you there, were you there?  
When I needed a healer, were you there?

Wherever you travel  
I'll be there, I'll be there  
Wherever you travel, I'll be there  
*And the creed and the colour*  
*And the name won't matter*  
*I'll be there*

Sydney Carter

### Bible readings: **Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18** **Matthew 10:40-42**

All of chapter 10 of Matthew's gospel, which the lectionary has given us for the last two Sundays and today, is instruction by Jesus to the 12 disciples. Jesus tells them that they should only go to the house of Israel, that is Jews, and not Gentiles and he tells them how they should conduct themselves. They should cure the sick, raise the dead and cast out demons. They should receive no payment. They should not carry any money, take no bag or spare clothes, for what they need will be given to them. This is still the way of Buddhist monks, they carry nothing except a bowl which people fill with food for them. Jesus tells the disciples that if they are welcomed they are to stay at that place, but if they are not, they should shake the dust off their feet and leave that house or town. He provides this

preparation for rejection to encourage them when they are not well received. There is nothing miraculous in this ritual of shaking off the dust, it is just a way to put bad experiences behind us and move on. In the last two verses of chapter 10 which we just heard, Jesus returns to the subject of welcome before moving on, in chapter 11, to proclaim his message in the cities, to the crowds, rather than speaking only to his disciples.

There is a reciprocal nature to how you treat other people: What you do for others you will see again in your own life – maybe not immediately, but at some point and often when you least expect it. We tend to have a sense of karma, or what goes around comes around, even though we do not follow Buddhism or Hinduism, where that is one of the central teachings – do good in this life, so that you will be reborn in a better position, until you eventually reach nirvana, a state of liberation and not being in a physical body. We are told in the Bible, in Galatians 6 for example, that we will reap what we sow. We know well the better-known verses in chapter 25 of Matthew's gospel, 'when I was hungry, you gave me food' and so on, and the flip side of it for those who did not give food, or shelter, or visit the sick or the prisoners – they will go to 'eternal punishment'. Why then are we not nicer to people? Why are we so quick to criticise and so slow to praise? It is of course easy to offer criticism and often when we are in pain, there is a tendency to lash out at others. And too much praise is not good either – praising a child for every little thing they do that might be considered normal development, makes praise for something really impressive meaningless. A child who thinks they are good at everything, grows into an adult with a sense of entitlement, not well equipped to deal with the inevitable disappointments of life like not getting into the university of their choice or not getting the job they wanted. But society now tends much towards instant and frequent criticism. The world has increasingly become a place where freedom to say what you think comes with the risk of criticism if not vile comments on social media, and in the case of well-known public figures death threats and the cancellation of speaking engagements.

I saw a video on Facebook this week that really brought this home to me – a teacher was writing the 9 times table up on the board and deliberately got the last one wrong. Straight away one of the students made fun of him (these were nearly adult students, not young children). He tells them he did it deliberately to teach them an important lesson. He had written 9 sums correctly and no one said anything, yet as soon as he made a mistake they commented on it. He asked them why that was, and one student said, because you are the teacher, you're supposed to be cleverer than us. And he replied, I may be the teacher, I may have some authority, but I'm still human and I make mistakes. I think sometimes,

Christ Church, 2 July 2023

people think that people in authority, including ministers, can continually take negativity as though they are somehow not human. But God does not put a force field around his disciples, they are flawed humans who make mistakes and feel pain, the same as everyone else. The teacher in the video went on to say that the world is quick to criticise and find fault, but much slower to praise and find the positive and social media and media in general exacerbate this. When was the last time you read a good news story? How many people, particularly in the public eye, find that something they said many years ago, is taken out of context and used against them? Sadly, churches can also be a place where criticism and negativity comes more easily than kind words.

In all too many congregations there are people who are hurting and feel they need to pass their pain on to others, by highlighting small mistakes. Those who are happy within themselves have no need to point out the faults in others. Not for nothing does Jesus say in Matthew chapter 7, 'first take the log out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye.'

Jesus concludes his instructions to his disciples with a pep talk about rewards for those who welcome his disciples and treat them well. Anyone who extends even the least kindness to one of Jesus' own will not lose their reward. Jesus says to the disciples whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. To welcome the disciple is to receive the God who sent him or her; to reject the disciple is to reject God. The word 'welcome' refers to the willingness to offer support and shelter to those who represent Jesus.

Sadly, the discouragements that come to those who go out in Jesus' name are real and the cords that bind them to the people to whom they are sent to minister are easily broken. I read in a commentary that some denominations report that over 50% of their clergy leave ordained ministry within five years of their ordination. And I have heard that before. Others stay out of necessity but lose much of the joy that initially filled their hearts for Christian ministry. In the URC, we know that very few people are studying to become ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament. We are constantly having to talk about deployment – essentially how we will eke out the few ministers we have to pastorates of more and more churches. A situation that will only get worse as the majority of ministers are nearing retirement age. Eastern Synod, as we know, is discussing new mission partnerships as they call them – how churches can share resources, knowledge, worship leaders and ministers, completely changing the face of ministry as we have known it for the past 50 years, and longer in the Congregational and Presbyterian traditions. Perhaps the wider church should

be talking more about how to encourage people to take up ministry. Or discussing what we want from ordained ministry, do we still want and need it? But that's above my paygrade! And maybe local congregations should be mindful of what they can do to keep the joy of ministry and discipleship alive.

Jesus himself clearly has a sense of the toughness and unyielding demands of congregants on their ministers, elders and worship leaders with this talk about shaking the dust off their feet and moving on when they are not welcomed. Jesus promises that those who bless the disciples along the way will not lose their reward. Something as innocent and simple as a cup of cold water, or a thank you, given to those who serve will ensure that the givers of such will not lose their reward in the kingdom of God.

Those in ministry, and that is ultimately all of us as we believe in the priesthood of all believers, need to hear the words of Jesus and trust his promises. The prophets and disciples who go out in his name must know that Jesus has promised to be with them and never to leave them alone. Those to whom they minister must remember that the Lord promises to reward those who find a way to bless the ministers and leaders among them. And that they will not lose their reward, be it now or at the end of the age, for something as simple as a cup of cold water or a word of praise, to those who minister among them in Jesus' name.

**Hymn** Brother, sister, let me serve you R&S 474

Brother, sister let me serve you.  
Let me be as Christ to you.  
Pray that I might have the grace  
To let you be my servant, too.

I will weep when you are weeping.  
When you laugh, I'll laugh with you.  
I will share your joy and sorrow  
Till we've seen this journey through.

We are pilgrims on a journey,  
and companions on the road.  
We are here to help each other  
Walk the mile and bear the load.

When we sing to God in heaven,  
We shall find such harmony  
Born of all we've known together  
Of Christ's love and agony.

I will hold the Christ-light for you  
In the night-time of your fear.  
I will hold my hand out to you;  
Speak the peace you long to hear.

Brother, sister let me serve you.  
Let me be as Christ to you.  
Pray that I might have the grace  
To let you be my servant, too.

Richard Gillard

**Prayers of intercession**

God, You are a God of compassion and steadfast love.  
Time after time we have experienced your care and provision.  
Time after time You've answered our prayers and met our needs  
often in ways we could never have dreamed possible.  
We praise You for Your faithful love toward us.  
Because we have known Your love, we come to You with confidence,

Christ Church, 2 July 2023

offering our prayers for the world that You love.  
We see so much pain and suffering;  
so much anger and frustration and despair.  
It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the needs around us.  
But we continue to bring our prayers to You in faith,  
because we know that nothing is impossible for You.

Lord, you call us to follow in your footsteps.  
Help us to know what this looks like in each situation where we find ourselves.  
Help us to know when following you means washing the feet of others,  
When it means breaking down the barriers that divide people, in our homes,  
in the places where we work, in the communities where we worship.  
Lord help us to be welcoming to all, and also to know when  
to shake the dust from our feet and move on.  
We grieve the fact that our world is divided and we ask that you work powerfully in our small lives  
and our big world to break down the walls that divide. We pray especially for...

Holy One, we pray for all people who are in trouble and fear today:  
For those who are sad because someone they love has died  
For those who are anxious because someone is ill or in pain  
For those who are lonely because someone they love is not there for them.

Lord bless: Those who are tired because they have too much to do  
Those who are struggling with financial difficulties  
Those who are unhappy because of an unkind word or action  
Holy One, surround those in need with your wisdom, your spirit,  
your healing and your life-giving peace.  
Shape us and transform us by your grace,  
that we may grow in wisdom and in confidence,  
never faltering until we give you the steadfast love that you desire,  
and we bring your realm of peace and love to fulfillment. Amen.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn** Will you come and follow me R&S 558

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?  
Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known,  
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?  
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?  
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?  
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?  
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?  
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,  
through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord your summons echoes true when you but call my name.  
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.  
In Your company I'll go where Your love and footsteps show.  
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

John Bell & Graham Maule

Christ Church, 2 July 2023

**Blessing**

May the blessing of God who risked everything for our sake,  
the blessing of Jesus Christ – the indignant youth – who cleanses everything  
and releases in us new visions of hope,  
and the blessing of the Holy Spirit who guides and directs us into new forms of obedience,  
be with us all. Amen

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